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ABSTRACT

A state-mandated survey was conducted of 255 special education administrators in California concerning support for students receiving special education services who engage in severe problem behaviors in school settings. A student with severe behavior problems was defined as a student with mild, moderate, severe, or profound intellectual disabilities who exhibited self-injury, injury to others, property damage, and/or disruption to instruction of self or others. Some results indicated that: (1) almost 80 percent reported that their district or county program provided inservice training to improve special education teachers' skills for working with students with severe behavior problems; (2) issues addressed in training and recommended for further inservice training included crisis intervention, nonaversive behavior management, communication and behavior, suspension and expulsion, and functional analysis of problem behavior; (3) administrators felt that training information was applied to classroom management in about 50 percent of the cases; (4) 43 percent of administrators had written policies that addressed procedures for teaching students with severe behavior problems; (5) extra support was provided to about 73 percent of teachers of these students, such as an instructional aide or behavior specialist; and (6) administrators felt that teachers' preservice training was not effective in preparing them in this area. Seventeen recommendations identified by the respondents for improving support for students with severe challenging behaviors are listed. (JDD)

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A Statewide Survey of California Administrators About Behavioral Interventions in Special Education

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On September 17, 1990, the Legislature of the State of California passed Assembly Bill (AB) 2586, also known as the Hughes Act. The Legislature declared that a statewide study be conducted of the use of behavioral interventions with California individuals with exceptional needs receiving special education and related services in order to guide the formation of regulations and teacher training efforts for individuals with special needs receiving special education. The scope of the study was developed by the California Department of Education, in consultation with the Advisory Commission on Special Education and other groups representing parents, teachers, administrators and advocates. Two studies were developed, one for teachers and the other for administrators. The surveys were designed to identify current practices and future training needs for supporting students with challenging behavior. This paper presents the results collected from the California administrators of special education, and is intended to summarize the raw survey data collected. The results from the survey of teachers and implications from both studies will be presented elsewhere (Dake, Fisher, & Pumpian, in preparation).

Methods

Participants

1,278 special education teachers and 255 special education administrators in California participated in the study, during the 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 school years. Participants were selected from a master list of County and District Offices of Education provided by the California California Department of Education. This paper presents the results of the 255 administrators of special education programs in California.

The variables under consideration in the study related to the distribution of, and support for, students receiving special education services who engage in severe problem behaviors in school settings.

A student with severe behavior problems was defined as a student with mild, moderate, severe, or profound inteliectual disabilities (e.g., Learning Handicapped, Mild/Moderately Handicapped, Severely Handicapped, S.E.D./Behavior Disorders, Profoundly/Multiply Handicapped) who exhibited one or more of the following behaviors:

1. *Self-Injury:* Behavior performed by the students that resulted in tissue damage to themselves (e.g., bruises, cuts, swelling, bleeding, etc.)
2. *Injury to others:* Behavior that resulted in tissue damage to other students or adults.
3. *Property damage:* The destruction of nontrivial property (e.g., clothing, windows, desks, walls).
4. *Disruption to instruction of self or others:* Other severe behavior problems that are pervasive and maladaptive that require a systematic and frequent application of behavioral interventions. The frequency and intensity of these behaviors prevent the student from benefiting from instruction and from participating in typical integrated settings.

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Administrator Survey. The second questionnaire, "Building Policy: A Statewide Survey Of California Administrators About Critical Issues Concerning Special Education," was completed by the participating administrators. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions divided into three sections. The first section contained three questions concerning current district policies and procedures. The second section consisted of four questions concerning the perceived efficacy of preservice training for teachers and the amount of existing resources, and any recommendations for improvement. The final question asked the administrators to identify the type of education agency with whom they were employed (e.g., District, County or "other").

Descriptors used to define students with severe behavior problems were the same as those described above in the teacher survey. Policy and procedural issues found within the administrator survey included questions concerning:

1. *Crisis intervention*
2. *Functional analysis* - Requirements for functional assessment of motivation for problem behavior
3. *Nonaversive behavior management*
4. *Communication and behavior*
5. *Suspension and expulsion*
6. *Use of aversives*
7. *Developing written behavior management plans*
8. *Documentation of evaluation of behavior change*
9. *Procedures not allowed*
10. *Procedures that require appropriate team review*

Administrators were asked to respond to questions regarding (a) whether inservice training to improve special education teachers' skills was provided and the type and frequency of the trainings; (b) whether the districts or county programs had written policies that address processes and procedures for teaching students with severe behavior problems and what types of policies and when written or last revised; and (c) whether "extra" support was provided by districts, county, or SELPA programs to teachers to respond to the needs of a student with severe behavior problems. Administrators also responded to questions concerning the basic staffing structure of their teachers' classrooms, the perceived efficacy of university-based preservice training and current resources available and recommendations for improving the ability of teachers and districts to respond to the needs of students with severe behavior problems. The questionnaire included forced-choice, open-ended, and Likert-type questions.

Procedures

Statewide Survey of California Administrators Questionnaire. Packets of questionnaires were sent by the California Department of Education to the special education administrators of each of the 1,067 county program and district offices in California that serve special education students. The packets included a cover letter from San Diego State University to the administrator, instructions for the completion and return of the questionnaire and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of the questionnaire to San Diego State University. The administrators were given a telephone number to call if they had any questions or concerns.

Results of Administrator Survey

Statewide Survey of California Administrators

Information about the administrators. A total of 255 administrators out of the 1067 contacted responded to and completed the survey (24%). Of the 255 questionnaires returned, 14 were from administrators employed in County program offices, 230 from administrators employed in district offices, eight were identified as "other," and three were not identified.

Inservice training. A total of 203 of the 255 responding administrators (79.6%) reported that their district or county program provided inservice training to improve special education teachers' skills for working with students with severe behavior problems. 52 administrators (20.4%) reported providing no inservice training. Those administrators who responded affirmatively reported an average of 4.7 inservice trainings in the past five years that focused on students with severe problem behaviors. Affirmative responses ranged from one to 25 trainings. The following issues were addressed in inservice trainings and have been recommended for further inservice training: Crisis intervention, nonaversive behavior management, communication and behavior, suspension and expulsion and functional analysis of problem behavior.

Actual teacher application of strategies presented in inservice trainings. Administrators were asked to rate, on a Likert-type scale from 1 (not at all applied) to 7 (fully applied), the extent that they perceived the strategies presented in inservice trainings were actually then applied to classroom management by teachers who attended. An overall average of 4.34 was reported by the administrators who responded. Based on these administrators' opinions, it can be assumed that information will be applied to the classroom in about 50% of the cases.

Written policies. Administrators were also asked whether their district or county program had written policy that addressed processes and procedures for teaching students with severe behavior problems. All 255 administrators responded to this item. 144 administrators (56.5%) responded "No," and 111 administrators (43.5%) responded "yes." Those administrators who responded affirmatively identified the following issues as being addressed within their written policy statements (listed in order of response frequency): Suspension and expulsion, developing written behavior management plans, definition of procedures that require appropriate team review, crisis intervention, definition of procedures not allowed, documentation of evaluation of behavior change, requirements for functional assessment of motivation of problem behavior and use of aversives.

Administrators who responded affirmatively to having written policies in place were also asked to identify when their policy statements were written or last revised. Participants were provided four items (a-d) to choose from. These response choice items and their corresponding frequency were: a) less than one year ago (34 people), b) one to two years ago (31 people), c) two to five years ago (30 people), and d) more than five years ago (8 people). Administrators were further asked to indicate whether the written policy was actually "in place" in their district or county programs (e.g., whether all special education teachers were provided with a policy statement, set of guidelines and procedures for working with students with severe behavior problems). Those administrators who responded negatively were asked to indicate when they anticipated having the policy in place. Of those who responded negatively, most indicated that they anticipated having the policy in place within six months to one year. Those administrators who responded affirmatively were asked to indicate to what extent they perceived the policies and procedures are actually used by the special education teacher in their district or county programs. Ratings were indicated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not used) to 7 (always used). An overall average of 4.85 was rated by those administrators who responded in the affirmative to having policies and procedures in place.

Extra support. Administrators were asked whether they provided "extra" support to their teachers to respond to the needs of students with severe behavior problems. "Extra" support was defined as resources which are additional to the basic instructional unit (i.e., additional to the teacher, instructional assistants(s), and regularly assigned DIS [Designated Instructional Services] staff) which are added to assist with students with severe behavior problems. Of the 255 who responded, 68 (26.7%) indicated that no extra support was provided. 186 administrators (72.9%) indicated that they did provide extra support to their teachers.

Those administrators who responded affirmatively supplied additional information by indicating the kind and amount of extra support provided. The following results (listed in order of frequency response) indicate the kind and average amount (in hours per week): Instructional aide (11.2), behavior specialist (1.3), "other" (.88), teacher (.62) and outside consultant (.61).

University-based preservice training. Question 4 of the survey asked administrators how effective they felt university-based preservice training was in preparing their special education teachers to work with students with severe behavior problems. Administrators were asked to circle a number on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not effective) to 7 (very effective). The overall average rating was 2.81. It is apparent that administrators do not feel that current university-based preservice training is effective in preparing teachers to work with students with severe problem behaviors.

Adequacy of resources and procedures. Question 5 of the survey asked administrators to what extent they agreed with the statement, "the resources and procedures currently available are adequate to meet the needs of students with very difficult behavior problems." Administrators were asked to circle a number on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The overall average rating given was 2.56. It is also clear that administrators do not feel that current resources and procedures available are adequate in meeting the needs of students with severe problem behaviors.

Allocation of additional resources. Question 6 asked administrators, "If additional resources were available, targeted for issues related to severe behavior problems, where do you feel they would best be spent?" Administrators were asked to rank order each of the items from one to five with one being "greatest priority need" to five indicating "least priority need." The following results (listed in order of greatest priority need) were indicated:

1. Improve school-wide inservice training
2. Increase resources for conducting home interventions
3. Increase number of staff
4. Provide more individual consultation from experts
5. Improve university-based preservice training

Administrator recommendations for improving support for students with severe challenging behaviors. One of the final questions on the questionnaire (Question 7) was an open-ended request for recommendations for "improving the ability of teachers and districts to respond to the needs of students with severe challenging behaviors." A total of 159 of the 257 administrators responded to this question with 369 statements. Many administrators made more than one recommendation. Administrator responses were transcribed verbatim and organized into 17 distinct recommendations.

Table 1 provides a listing of the administrator recommendations and the number of administrators who made each recommendation. The most frequent recommendations were to provide in-service workshops, program and curriculum development and provide consultants who directly assist teachers and teaching assistants in the development and implementation of plans to support students with challenging behavior. Generally, emphasis was given to strategies that would improve the competence of the teacher. Recommendations for external assistance from consultants and other multidisciplinary team members stressed the need for hands-on, repeated contact. A fourth highly rated recommendation was to improve/increase preservice training. A fifth highly rated recommendation was to work with family and others involved with the student. These findings are consistent with a study conducted in Oregon (Horner, Diemer, & Brazeau, 1992) as well as the survey of California teachers (Dake, Fisher, & Pumpian, in preparation).

Table 1
Most Common Recommendations Made by Administrators for Improving Ability of Teachers and Districts to Respond to Needs of Students with Severe Behavior Problems a,b

Ranking	Recommendation Category	Total Administrator Comments
1	In-service workshops	65
2	Program and curriculum development	43
3	Consultant support/counseling	39
4	Improve/increase preservice training	38
5	Work with family and other involved with student	31
6	Increase multidisciplinary team support	28
7	Reallocation of resources	26
8	In-service for administrators and general education teachers	22
9	Clarify procedures and policies	21
10	Increase staff-to-student ratio (e.g., additional teaching assistants	12
11	Visit effective programs	11
12	Team teaching/collaboration	10
13	Optional placement outside regular school	8
13	Decrease class size (e.g., reduce number of students per class)	8
14	Inclusion/integration with nondisabled peers	6
15	Administrative support/supervisor evaluation of programs	2
16	Change school environment	0

a 159 administrators with 369 comments
b From Question 7 of the Statewide Survey of California Administrators About Critical Issues Concerning Special Education.